

Cicero's tastes in poetry have attracted considerable attention, largely because of his few, but notorious comments on contemporary Roman poetry (*Att.* 7.2.1, *Orat.* 161), especially his reference in the *Tusculan Disputations* (3.45) to *his cantoribus Euphorionis*. This paper will argue that Cicero's conservative tastes in poetry developed earlier in his career than is generally acknowledged and were not a reaction to the advent of the so-called (by him) 'new poets'.

Cicero's early career as a poet, with his experiments in Hellenistic style (Clausen, *HSCP* 90 [1986] 159-70), has led many (e.g. E. Malcovati, *Cicerone e la poesia* [1943]; M. P. O. Morford, *CP* 62 [1967] 112-16; N. Horsfall, *PLLS* 7 [1993] 1-7) to conclude that his antipathy to contemporary Latin poets and championing of early poets was due either to his distaste for the new style or to wounded pride at being displaced as Rome's leading poet (Plut. *Cic.* 2.4). Thus Shackleton Bailey (*JCS* [1983] 249): 'it was less patriotic pride or literary pleasure than the potent impulse of punctured self-esteem which made him their champion.' But the proximate cause for Cicero's shift from young practitioner of poetry in the Hellenistic tradition to advocate for Ennius and patriotic epic may not have been pride in his poetic accomplishments, but his wounded pride in his political achievements. In the speech in defense of the now rather elderly poet Archias, Cicero deflects attention away from the earlier works of Archias, which are probably best represented by some of the epigrams attributed to him in the *Palatine Anthology* (3588-3795 G-P). Instead, Cicero represents Archias as an epic poet, dwelling on his treatment in epic of his patron Lucullus' accomplishments in the Mithridatic wars (*Arch.* 21) and extemporizing verse, not epigram, in honor of his patrons (cf. A. Hardie, *Statius and the Silvae* [1983] 82-3). The praise that Cicero accords Archias' epics is consonant with the hypothesis of a developing predilection for early poets (*Arch.* 18): *ea sic uidi probari ut ad ueterum scriptorum laudem perueniret*. The stimulus for the utilitarian view of epic poetry as praise of *uirtus* is Cicero's political situation in 62 BCE on the occasion of this speech. In the context of Pompey's snub (cf. *Fam.* 5.7 and Shackleton Bailey ad loc.) and attendant difficulties with his agents in Rome, Cicero was thinking of his reputation, and the views expressed in this speech on the uses of epic reflect his already evolving concern for his legacy (*Arch.* 14): *imagines non solum ad intuendum uerum etiam ad imitandum fortissimorum uirorum expressas scriptores et Graeci et Latini reliquerunt*.

By the time Catullus and his contemporaries were injecting new life into the Roman literary scene in the fifties, Cicero's tastes had already shifted to Ennius and historical epics, like Archias', or others that were the target of Catullus' Callimachean barbs (A. Cameron, *Callimachus and his Critics* [1995] 288-9). Cicero's likes and dislikes in poetry had more to do with political circumstance than aesthetic judgment or inspiration, for as Shackleton Bailey (*JCS* [1983] 249) put it, 'whether he knew it or not, he *did* lack inspiration, *all* the time. And it failed to excite him in contemporary genius: blind to Catullus, purblind to Lucretius.' In preference to both: the *Bellum Mithridaticum* of Archias.